



How can SpeleoHealth – a medical tour operator – launch speleootherapy services provided in the Republic of Belarus in Belarusian Speleootherapy Center in Soligorsk for international market?

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ABSTRACT

Being an applied-research project, the purpose of this dissertation is to enable patients with respiratory diseases in non-Russian speaking countries to get an access to a drug-free way of asthma and allergy treatment – speleootherapy, provided by SpeleoHealth. SpeleoHealth is a tour operator in medical tourism registered in Lithuania which offers speleootherapy services in Belarusian Speleootherapy Center. Another purpose of this dissertation is to research potential market for the company – SpeleoHealth – in order to understand how speleootherapy as a service can be better presented for the clients with respiratory diseases.

Ultimately, and this is our main finding, two conditions were identified to get the market for SpeleoHealth. The first is to raise potential clients' awareness in speleootherapy which is now not regarded as a sufficient therapy to treat asthma and other respiratory diseases. Second, it will be shown that SpeleoHealth offers the services in the business area which may be characterized as an area of high business risks. An existence of such risks may negatively influence on the sustainability of the project in a long-term perspective without risks minimization.

Finally, we present a strategy plan of SpeleoHealth Company which aims at expanding speleootherapy services information among potential clients, attracting new patients for trial therapy stay in the Center and risk minimization strategy in order to be sustainable.

Key words: speleootherapy, SpeleoHealth, Belarusian SpeleoTherapy Center, asthma, allergy, respiratory diseases, drug-free methods

RESUMO

Sendo um projeto de pesquisa aplicada, o objetivo desta dissertação é permitir que pacientes com doenças respiratórias em países de língua não-russa tenham acesso a um tratamento de asma e alergia sem drogas - speleotherapy, fornecido pela SpeleoHealth. SpeleoHealth é um operador turístico em turismo médico registado na Lituânia que oferece serviços de espeleoterapia no Centro de Espeleologia bielorrusso. Outro objetivo desta dissertação é pesquisar mercado potencial para a empresa - SpeleoHealth - a fim de entender como speleotherapy como um serviço pode ser melhor apresentado para os clientes com doenças respiratórias.

Em última análise, e este é o nosso principal descoberta, duas condições foram identificadas para obter o mercado para SpeleoHealth. O primeiro é aumentar a conscientização dos clientes potenciais em speleotherapy que agora não é considerado como uma terapia suficiente para tratar a asma e outras doenças respiratórias. Em segundo lugar, será demonstrado que a SpeleoHealth oferece os serviços na área de negócios que podem ser caracterizados como uma área de altos riscos comerciais. A existência desses riscos pode influenciar negativamente a sustentabilidade do projeto numa perspectiva de longo prazo, sem minimização dos riscos.

Por fim, apresentamos um plano estratégico da SpeleoHealth Company, que visa ampliar a informação dos serviços de espeleoterapia entre os potenciais clientes, atrair novos pacientes para estadia em terapia de avaliação no Centro e minimizar a estratégia de risco para ser sustentável.

Palavras chave: Espeleoterapia, SpeleoHealth, Centro de SpeleoTherapy da Bielorrússia, asma, alergia, doenças respiratórias, métodos livres de drogas

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While choosing a topic of my dissertation, I realized that it should correspond to my personal two requirements: a main challenge of the work must be familiar to me, it should cover what affects my life and the life of the people around me; and secondly, the results I get from the thesis research could be used in a real business life in a form of an entrepreneurial project to be launched simultaneously with the thesis writing. Therefore when my dissertation seminar area was confirmed - Entrepreneurship and Innovation Strategies in Healthcare Management – I understood that I want to contribute to the topic in the field of respiratory diseases and their treatment.

Suffering myself from bronchial asthma and allergy and seeing the same kind of diseases in my family I have always been trying to find a better treatment solution for it. Several years ago I tried a new way of treating asthma – speleotherapy in the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center - which improved my health state and after my recommendations a health state of my mother. I was so inspired by the therapy that I realized that it must be better known not only in my region but also abroad, where people who are suffering from respiratory diseases have no access to the same kinds of non-medical therapies.

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Susana Frazão Pinheiro, for her assistance in support in the thesis writing process and her professional organization of all administrative issues from the academic side. Moreover I thank the administration of the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center which gave me an access to some very useful information about the Center working results. And of course I thank my family, friends and colleagues who were constantly supporting me for several months while I was writing my dissertation.

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Nowadays 1 in 13 people have asthma and even more suffer from allergy of different kinds¹. Unfortunately at the moment there is no cure for asthma, but it may be managed and controlled by medications or on a drug-free basis. At the moment there is a plenty of different medications which can help the patients who suffer from asthma attacks, however they mostly address the symptoms of asthma and do not decrease the risks of future asthma attacks. Another way to deal with asthma is to develop drug-free methods, which may be used by the patients before they face asthma attacks.

One of such methods is speleotherapy – *“is a method, using the specific and unique properties of environment of the underground space of karst caves to treat the chronic and allergic respiratory disorders”*². At the moment speleotherapy is not widely-used method to treat asthma, because the researches which have proved a positive effects of it are not recognized worldwide, therefore speleotherapy is used mostly in the East European countries as an alternative non-medical asthma treatment.

The aim of this research is to analyze a potential marketing strategy of a newly established company – SpeleoHealth, which offers medical tour services for the patients with respiratory diseases. The main medical service offered by SpeleoHealth – speleotherapy tours to the Belarussian Speleotherapy Center in Soligorsk, Belarus. Currently about 80 % of the patients in the center are Belarusian residents, and the rest are the patients from the neighbor countries – Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Kazakhstan. Since at the moment the effects of the therapy in the center are proved to be positive, there is a need to open an opportunity to visit the center for the patients from outside the Russian-speaking region by launching a marketing campaign with detailed explanation of the therapy, description of the center and potential positive effects of the stays.

Before implementing a launch campaign of SpeleoHealth it is important to investigate all the factors which build a strategy of the company. In this paper, two main questions will be addressed, which potentially influence the success of the SpeleoHealth launch campaign:

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/>

² <http://www.speleoterapia.sk/engl/speleotherapy.htm>

1. What is the most effective strategy to attract the clients for SpeleoHealth services in Belarus?
2. What are the best ways to provide business sustainability for SpeleoHealth in a long-run period?

This dissertation is written in the form of a case study as it is focused on a specific company, SpeleoHealth.

In chapter 2 - Literature Review – the accent will be done on the entrepreneurship climate in the economy as a prerequisite for new business creation. Also a healthcare current situation will be described with the stress on the main reasons of its ineffectiveness and a need for the existence of new firms which could deal with these inefficiencies and eliminate them. Also the issues of a lack of start-ups in health care industry will be discussed. Together with that the aspects of on-line business promotion for start-ups in health care industry will be covered. Moreover a focus will be made on another aspect of the project – understanding of the risks in the business model of the company which may negatively influence the sustainable growth of SpeleoHealth in a long run period. The aim of that part will be to understand possible ways of the risks minimization to help a company survive.

Chapter 3 - the Case Study – will be devoted to the project description: the story of SpeleoHealth, its mission and vision, stages passed and planned. Also an overview of the activities will be provided as well as a short-term and long-term plan of business development.

Chapter 4 - the Teaching Notes – discussion of the two main questions, based on the results of the first business stages of the SpeleoHealth and the concepts referred in the literature review.

In final **Chapter 5** Conclusions and future strategy recommendations will be provided.

This dissertation as an example of a business case which is being implemented in certain business environment conditions may be used as an education material for entrepreneurs who might be interested in launching a new business in the field of medical tourism. Also it may be useful for the students who want to develop their business ideas in

cross-border intercultural conditions with high political risks, because the questions of business risks will be covered in the paper.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is entrepreneurship?

A modern world is facing an era of an intensive growth of entrepreneurial spirit all around the globe. Nowadays with the development of all spheres of modern time, more and more sides of life are open to be re-thought, combined and optimized, which is being executed by an entrepreneur, who first sees the opportunity of a new project to be started and after that takes responsibility of its implementation and sustainable growth.

An economic history shows a long-lasting transformation of a definition “an entrepreneur”. However it is possible to use one which reflects a modern understanding of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is - “the resource, process and state of being through and in which individuals utilize positive opportunities in the market by creating and growing new business firms.”³

The speed of entrepreneurship development depends greatly on the stage of the economy in a given country. According to Porter (2002), there are three stages of the economy which define the competitiveness in the economy and also affect the entrepreneurial state in the country: (1) “*factor-driven stage*”, (2) “*efficiency-driven stage*” and (3) “*innovation-driven stage*”⁴, and also there is a couple of transitional periods between the first and the second stage. In the first stage the economy is defined by a big amount of small sole entrepreneurs of a non-agricultural nature (service firms and small manufactures). In that stage the economy does not produce any innovative knowledge neither for internal use nor for exporting. In order to move from this stage into the second one – efficiency-driven stage – the country must educate the working force; enlarge the implication of efficient production (again based on the knowledge) and start experiencing the economy of scale. “*Industries in this stage are manufacturers or provide basic services*”⁵.

The next stage - the efficiency-driven stage – is characterized by the drop of a number of entrepreneurs. The reasons of this might be explained by the following: when the economy becomes wealthier, the average sizes of the companies are growing as well. “*Average firm*

³ Gries, T. and Naudé, W.A. (2011). ‘Entrepreneurship and human development: A capability approach’, *Journal of Public Economics*, 3 (1): 216-224

⁴ Porter, M., Sachs, J., & McArthur, J. (2002). Executive summary: Competitiveness and stages of economic development. In M. Porter, J. Sachs, P. K. Cornelius, J. W. McArthur, & K. Schwab (Eds.), *The global competitiveness report 2001–2002* (pp. 16–25). New York: Oxford University Press

⁵ Syrquin, M. (1988). Patterns of structural change. In *Handbook of Development Economics* (pp. 203–273). Amsterdam: New York: North-Holland.

size is an increasing function of the wealth of the economy if capital and labor substitute. When capital and labor are substitutes, an increase in the capital stock increases returns from working and lowers returns from managing. In other words, marginal managers find they can earn more money when employed by somebody else”⁶. Therefore when the economy is developing, there may be fewer entrepreneurs.

In the final (innovation-driven) stage the entrepreneurial activity goes up. If the economy reaches the final stage there is a clear trend when a number of small companies begin to increase (unlike it was in the previous stage when there is always a tendency of an economy to move from smaller companies to larger ones).

The main reasons for this are regarded to be the following: first of all, when economy is turning to a developed stage, a ratio between manufacturing and providing services is changing because of a decline in manufacturing. A high efficiency of production reached on the previous development stages enables to provide a necessary level of products for internal consumption and exporting and therefore all extra resources are turning into a service sector. Moreover service businesses are generally smaller in scale what contributes to a change of an average firm size in the economy. Also a service economy provides more opportunities for entrepreneurship and that is why their number may increase.

Secondly, after the wars the developed world was oriented at the service-type business such as information technologies, telecommunications which are favorable for entrepreneurs.

Therefore referring to the theories above, we may conclude that the majority of developed countries are at the third stage now, which offers productive conditions for the entrepreneurs to build up new companies as well as contribute to further economic development. However when the business is operating among several markets, which are in different stages of development, it may lead to a situation when business conditions only on one market are appropriate for this specific kind of business and relatively risky on the other one. Also this difference may be amplified by not only institutional differences but also cultural diversities, which make a smooth work even less possible.

⁶ Ács, Z.J., Desai, S. and Hessels, J. (2008). ‘Entrepreneurship, economic development and institutions’, *Small Business Economics*, 31: 219-234

2.2 Entrepreneurship in Healthcare

Even in the countries which are in the third stage of development (efficiency driven stage) entrepreneurship is developing not equally in all industries of the country economy. For example, a medical care industry is regarded to be enormously ineffective. According to David M. Cutler (2011), the analysis of the costs and the outcomes in this industry are characterized by the worst ratio compared to other fields of economy. However the main problem is not that the sphere requires a lot of spending, because of a growth of financial operations may be quite positive, for example, in case of investing in new technologies. In other words, *“in an efficient industry, spending more on a good is not a cause for concern”*⁷. However when we are talking about the industries where inefficiency occurs, new companies come to eliminate it; however it does not happened in the healthcare sphere. There are three main explanations why it happens:

- According to Fuchs (1974), the first reason may be connected with a common term in the history of economics - a “flat of the curve”⁸. Because of the situation when the costs of receiving the treatment are low and the financial incentives of the care provider are high, no side is inclined to decrease an amount of medical activities. Therefore finally from the medical services side, much more will be offered without strong evidence that this is going to be effective in terms of positive results. **Figure 1** shows the levels when the treatment is optimal and when it is excessive⁸.

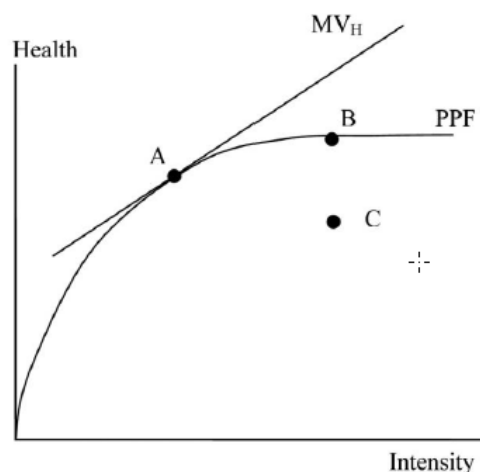


Figure 1: The levels of treatment at medical institutions⁸

⁷ David M. Cutler (2011), “Where are the Health Care Entrepreneurs? The Failure of Organizational Innovation in Health Care”, Innovation Policy and the Economy, Volume 11, National Bureau of Economic Research, University of Chicago Press: 1-28

⁸ Fuchs, Victor. 1974. Who Shall Live? New York: Basic Books.

PPF (production possibility frontier), MVH (marginal value of health). The point of effective care is A, because two lines intersect in this point. In point B, the treatment is excessive and in point C the treatment is not sufficient. According to the researches, mostly a provided treatment is located in point B, which causes extra costs and ineffectiveness.

- The second possible reason of ineffectiveness in health care is a bad medical coordination in healthcare and a poor level of preventive control activities. When the patients require a special treatment, the medical institutions schedule all necessary medical activities and take responsibility for that. However when a patient needs a general examination regime and basic control tests, the responsibility for that is being transferred from the doctors' side to the patients', which leads to an inadequate level of pre-hospitalization control.
- The third reason of considerable disproportion in health care between costs and the quality of the results may be explained by a non-optimized medical process system. The doctors spend too much time for administrative duties, which leads to extra costs of the whole system and also can bring more medical errors which are also very costly. According to the statistics, every year because of medical errors (which could have been prevented) around 44.000-98.000 deaths occur, which pushed this reason in the top of ten leading causes of death⁹.

Therefore the reasons described above show that if a person wants to be treated in a medical institution there is a chance that he will pay a lot for the services he does not require. Therefore it is evident that the industry is in situation when inefficiency does not only exist but is very considerable and could be managed by healthcare entrepreneurial projects which deal with inefficiencies in other industries of economy. However a speed of new companies' development is very slow and therefore there is a question, why it happens.

The first reason may be explained by the fact that the first step in medical services optimization must be done from the services provider side and not by external agent. The second reason is closely connected with the barriers which are on the market and do not let new young companies to deal with the business flaws of big medical services providers. These barriers may include "*network externalities*"¹⁰, which lead to a situation when new

⁹ Institute of Medicine. 2000. To Err Is Human. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

¹⁰ Entrepreneurship and Economic Development: Theory, Evidence and Policy Wim Naudé UNU-MERIT and MGSOG, University of Maastricht, MsM and IZA Discussion Paper No. 7507 July 2013

companies just cannot integrate into a business infrastructure because of a lack of network capabilities. Another reason which is very close with the previous one is an informational asymmetry barrier. The reasons of inefficiencies in medical services are clear for those players who provide those services, but can be not evident for others, which limits their chances to eliminate these inefficiencies. Therefore if new companies appear on the market, they mostly operate as intermediators between patients and medical institutions or become a part of a bigger market player to eliminate the business barriers mentioned above.

2.3 Medical tourism sphere

An existence of flaws in medical care system as well as a lack of opportunities in some parts of the world to provide needed specific medical services are stimulating to develop an alternative service in medical sphere – medical tourism. The history of this ideas goes back to the ancient times. According to Reisman (2010) even ancient Romans “*visited thermal bathes*”¹¹ in special regions because of the treatment effect. The same could be found in the history of the ancient Greeks. All this may be regarded as the first examples of medical tourism, caused by a need to improve a health state by travelling to another location.

If the idea of travelling for medical purposes has not changed over time, the quality and the quantity side of this phenomenon has changed dramatically due to a lot of factors: demographical changes, social and economic development etc. Moreover a development of healthcare industry, inventions of new medical methods, equipment and models of treatment have created more prerequisites for unequal medical services opportunities in the world. And in its turn it led to a growing demand for medical tourism services around the world.

Even looking back on the past several years, according to Keckley and Underwood (2008) the prognoses of “*only the Americans who would travel abroad to get medical treatment in 2012*” could have reached a figure 1.6 million people¹².

According to Gahlinger (2008), currently more than 50 countries are focusing on a medical tourism industry as an opportunity for exporting services and therefore are aiming at adjusting their healthcare laws to enable their medical institutions to accept international

¹¹ Reisman, D. (2010), *Health Tourism: Social Welfare through International Trade* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited).

¹² Keckley, P.H., Underwood, H.R. (2008), *Medical Tourism: Consumer in Search of Value*, (Washington: Deloitte Center for Health Solutions).

patients.¹³ Mostly these countries are concentrated in East Europe (Poland, Belarus, Lithuania, Hungary) and Asia (Thailand, India, Singapore, Malaysia).

A term of medical tourism is a very broad one and has been differently defined in literature for many years. Both in literature and in a business world, there is a mix in definitions, when medical tourism covers all medical spheres, for example health tourism as well. In this paper a medical tourism will be defined as it was offered by Smith and Puczko (2009) - “travel to destinations to undergo medical treatments such as surgery or other specialist interventions”.¹⁴

Nowadays there is a clear growth of medical tourism demand. As it is stated by Connell (2006)¹⁵, the main factors which cause this growth are:

- Development of information technologies, the Internet in particularly;
- An increase of health intermediators – the companies which do not provide medical services directly but provide communicational services between the patients and the hospitals abroad;
- A development of health care systems in the countries of developing world, which is defined not only in terms of technical improvement but also legal system unifications which enables to accept international clients/patients.

Taking into account the assumptions provided in the previous section, another reason for a medical tourism popularity growth may be an unsatisfactory level of national medical institutions when the services are excessive but at the same time very expensive, which motivates the patients to start looking for alternative treatment options abroad.

Of course, there are many types of medical tourism. Only taling about tourism with surgery intervention, it is possible to name cosmetic surgery, cardiology and cardiac surgery, organ and tissue transplantation and solid organ transplantation. But regardless of the type of the medical tourism, many reasons urge the patients to use it. “For example, in 2011 about 52% of health care service consumers in France, 45% in Germany, and 36% in the UK

¹³ Gahlinger, P. (2008), *The Medical Tourism Travel Guide: Your Complete Reference to Top-Quality, Low-Cost Dental, Cosmetic, Medical Care & Surgery Overseas* (North Branch: Sunrise River Press).

¹⁴ Smith, M., Puczko, L. (2009), *Health and Wellness Tourism*, (Amsterdam: Butterworth Heinemann): p.101

¹⁵ Connell, J. (2006), “Medical tourism: Sea, sun, sand and ... surgery”, *Tourism Management*, 27(6): 1093-1100.

Therefore there are more and more reason why the patients choose to travel abroad to get a medical help. A more in-depth-analysis performed by Jagyasi (2011)¹⁶ identified and ranked ten main reasons why patients decide to travel abroad for medical treatment¹⁷.

In sum, according to Oliver Kesar (2011), the medical tourism sphere which is constantly developing differs immensely starting from its type, ending with the reasons which contribute to its development.

expressed their disappointment with long waiting lists in their countries of residence¹⁸.

2.4 Promotion Strategies in medical tourism

The main purpose why people decide to look at medical tourism services is a price for medical services and the quality. According to Nawaz Ahmad (2014), talking about a consumer behavior, it is necessary to say that when a person is choosing to buy a product or service, he is paying attention to either a word of mouth reviews (when bigger sums are involved) or/and also checking the reviews. In case of medical tourism, these trends must be even amplified because the service is associated with the health of a person, which may cause a more attentive approach for choosing a service supplier.

Medical tourism is becoming more and more popular not only because of medical sphere development but also as it was mentioned above because of unequal medical services quality in the world as well. Another reason is that the development of information technologies enables to promote the services by means of social media, professional on-line magazines and doctors' portals. Therefore a boom of medical tourism development is based on the modern promotional tools. Thus, it is possible to state a list of the most basic and effective ways of promoting medical services:

- The first and the main way to start promoting medical services is a **web-site of the company**. The web-site is a face of the company and a chance to impress the client with a clear explanation of the offered service and appealing visuals which can make potential clients become interested and get in contact with you.
- **“SEO (search engine optimization)”¹⁹** for your web-site. If you do not meet a client in person and show him the web-site address, then your web-site should have a good

¹⁶ Appendix 6

¹⁷ Oliver Kesar, Katarina Rimac, (2011) “Medical Tourism Development in Croatia” : p.114

¹⁸ Keckley, P.H., Coughlin, S. (2011), *2011 Survey of Health Care Consumers Global Report: Key Findings, Strategic Implications* (Washington: Deloitte Center for Health Solutions).

search engine optimization in order to be found. According to the statistics²⁰, about 87 % of travelers use the Internet to plan their tours and therefore for medical tours operator it must be a good tool to attract the clients. In order to make the web-site more popular, it is possible to optimize the web-site by the keywords, including social networks links, work at the content quality and even use paid SEO services such as Google AdWords.

- **A recommendation** is one of the strongest reasons to choose this particular service. *“According to Nielsen’s latest Global Trust in Advertising report, 92 percent of consumers around the world say they trust recommendations from friends and family, above all other forms of advertising. The second most trusted source of brand information and messaging is consumer online reviews at 70 percent. People take planning a vacation and travel very seriously, but they take their health even more seriously. Securing authentic positive recommendations is vital”*²¹. Recommendations must be placed either on the web-site or in social media feed, and that is what may contribute a lot into services promotion in the sphere of medical tourism.
- **Personal engagement** between the client and the company. A patient who is choosing a medical service more than require a personal approach to his situation and therefore this need must be provided and moreover it may be provided for example by means of on-line chat on the web-site, or a possibility to arrange a skype consulting call upon the client’s request.

2.5 Political business risks

Even a stable business either in medical tourism sphere or any other may face a lot of risks especially when the business is on the early stages of development. Some kinds of risk are an integral part of business nature, however there are risks which are barely predictable and therefore must be considered very attentively. One of them is a political risk. According to Peter Beardshaw (2012), *“Political risks are uncertainties to business objectives created by political actors or political conditions”*²². Political risks may stem directly from government institutions or, for example, government companies whose business policy is directed by the government.

¹⁹ <https://www.healthcarecommunication.com/Main/Articles/5>

²⁰ <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/online-travel-industry/467349?red=at>

²¹ <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2012/consumer-trust-in-online-social-and-mobile-advertising-grows.html>

²² Peter Beardshaw, Ben Cattaneo (2012), “Managing Political Risk”, Accenture report.

It is evident that when working with state-owned companies, a level of political risks rises tremendously. Political risks may vary from bribery to contract defaults, from taxations to wars and other critical decisions. Therefore in order to manage this kind of risks, it is necessary to go through a risk-minimization strategy, which may be based on three main stages:

- The first stage is **risk identification**. In this stage it is absolutely vital to define an exact type of risks which exist and may negatively affect the business operations. Moreover it is important to outline a potential scenario of the business in case the risks occur. The quality of the scenario may help to identify potential steps to minimize the risks.
- **Risk measurement**. In this stage different models may be used to measure the risks and understand its potential influence on the business in figures.
- **Risk management stage** implies strategic decisions to be made to avoid potential negative influences of the political risks detected.

As an example of a political risk management scenario it is possible to set an example of business operation between a (1) state-owned company and a (2) privately-owned partner. In this example the second company may face a political risk – let's assume - of a contract default.

First of all the second company should be sure that this risk is possible. After that in the second stage it has to realize to what situation (size of losses) it would lead if the contract is abrogated. And finally the second company has to manage the risks. Possible solutions of this problem (risk minimization) might be the following: portfolio diversification to become less dependent from the first company; political risks insurance; agile supply chain; joint business ventures with local companies who can maneuver in local business environment.

In short, it is evident that each business faces a lot of risks including political ones. In that case the company has to include in its strategy a plan of risks minimization as a prerequisite to operate smoothly in a long-term period.

Chapter 3: CASE STUDY

3.1 How that all began

What can be better when spring comes, the last snow melts, when the sun warms everything around and it seems every single part of nature awakes and prepares for something special? The trees start blooming and first flowers are stretching to the sun. For some people it is a miracle; but for those who suffer from seasonal allergy and allergic asthma – it is the end of a peaceful winter time.

Siarhei has been suffering from allergy since he was twelve, when the first symptoms started to appear: eyes itching, sneezing, and sometimes urticaria and eyes swelling. It is known that allergy may be managed and controlled if a person who suffers from it just avoids his allergens. But what if your body reacts to almost all kinds of farina, pollen, fungus, pet dander, domestic allergens (e.g. dust mite) and moreover you have genetic predisposition to develop the allergy into bronchial asthma? Does it mean that all the year round and in every place you are at danger to have either moderate allergy symptoms or even face a serum shock in case you forget to take your anti-histamine pills? That was exactly Siarhei's case, a person who didn't want to live always in fear of having health disruptions and always taking with him his pills to control allergy attacks.

Nevertheless after 6 years of suffering from the allergy and trying to control it by means of special medications prescribed by the doctor, at the age of 18 Siarhei was diagnosed to have allergic bronchial asthma. It meant that his allergy developed into another stage, when the allergic reaction causes cough, respiratory distress and asphyxia. This is called an asthma attack, which may leave only a few seconds for a person or people around him to save his life by using a special inhaler with medication which instantly penetrates into the lungs of a person and expands the bronchial tubes to let the person breath. Moreover when a person is diagnosed with asthma, he should avoid physical activities, take care about his diet, avoid going to the countryside and many, many others! For Siarhei, who had always been a sporty and active person, who loved animals and traveled a lot this was a real catastrophe which motivated him to start looking for an alternative way to treat his asthma or at least control it to the extent when no special treatment is required.

Sometime later Siarhei's doctor mentioned that in Belarus there is a special center which offers speleootherapy – a kind of therapy which addresses the problems of the patients

with asthma and allergy. A stay in the center – the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center²³ – implies about two weeks of speleotherapy – breathing practices in special salt caves which are located about 420 meters under the ground. Without any hesitations, Siarhei went to the Center and after a treatment set was surprised by the results he got: if before he always had to take anti-histamine pills every day and always bring an asthma inhaler with him, after the stay he completely forgot about their existence. A few years later he tried another stay to support the results and since that time only a notification in his medical history could remind him that he has asthma²⁴.

Being an entrepreneur by nature and running several small businesses, Siarhei realized that there is something which he can and should address, which is very important to him and can be very useful for people who know what it means to be afraid of every coming spring or a fluffy puppy passing by. Therefore after a short time a new idea was born – to offer speleotherapy services in the Belarussian Speleotherapy Center for those who suffer from respiratory diseases but cannot find the center for any reason.

3.2 What is asthma?

Nowadays we hear more and more about asthma, but it is not always known what it is, what are the causes, symptoms and possible results of asthma attacks. “Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways that causes recurring episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness and coughing, particularly at night or in the early morning”.²⁵

Asthma is a very widely-spread disease. It can affect everyone irrespective of location and age. Mostly asthma starts in childhood and stays with a person in the adulthood. More rarely the first symptoms of asthma arise already in the adulthood. However when the first cases of asthma for the adults appear, the reasons may be connected not with latent asthma, held from the childhood and relapsed, it may be caused by allergic conditions or appear as consequences of a respiratory disease of any kind.

²³ The name of the Center was translated not literally. In Russia it is “Belarusian Speleotherapy Hospital”. It was done on purpose to avoid possible negative associations with a word ‘hospital’.

²⁴ These were demonstrated in several studies including Palmer, L.J., Burton, P.R., Faux, J.A., James, A.L., Musk, A.W. and Cookson, W.O. (2000) Independent inheritance of serum immunoglobulin E concentrations and airway responsiveness. *Am J Respir Crit Care Med*, 161, 1836-1843 and Duffy, D.L., Martin, N.G., Battistutta, D., Hopper, J.L. and Mathews, J.D. (1990) Genetics, of asthma and hay fever in Australian twins. *Am Rev Respir Dis*, 142, 1351-1358

²⁵ John Gibson (2012) *European Lung White Book*, Published by the European Respiratory Society: p.138

In sum, the main points about asthma are the following:

- According to European White Book, currently only in Europe more than 30 million children and adults under 45 years old have asthma (See Appendix 1);
- Recently the number of asthma cases in Western Europe has decreased, but the UK and Ireland have some of the highest rates of asthma in the world.
- Important to state that talking about adults with asthma, we include the cases when asthma relapsed from the childhood, when it has been and stayed from the childhood and also the cases of developed asthma cases in the adulthood.
- There is a difference between asthma and COPD²⁶, which have similar clinical features but have different nature and must be treated differently.
- There is no cure for asthma, but it may be controlled on the early stages of disease, but often the patients with asthma require constant medical supervision.

At the moment there are no fixed diagnostic tests to confirm asthma. The diagnostic process is based on the number of breathing tests (e.g. FEV²⁷ or PEF²⁸ tests), responses to questionnaires, allergic tests, physical tests and other. Moreover asthma may appear because of different reasons and also it may be confused with COPD.

Mostly asthma has its origins in childhood; and because of the recent rise of asthma in European countries, it is regarded that a combination of environmental determinants and genetically susceptible population may lead to the asthma development. However the reasons or the drivers of asthma are still unidentified, but analyzing the distribution of the cases it is evident that it is connected to *'a 'Western' environment, possibly reflective of urbanization and less exposure to microorganisms that are protective against asthma and allergy (the 'hygiene hypothesis')'*²⁹. The associations which study asthma and in particularly the genes which may cause it, have identified a set of asthma genes that are account for a small proportion of asthma heritability. However it is still not clear what mechanisms initiate the disease.

²⁶ **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)** is an umbrella term used to describe progressive lung diseases including emphysema, chronic bronchitis, refractory (non-reversible) asthma, and some forms of bronchiectasis. This disease is characterized by increasing breathlessness. (www.copdfoundation.org)

²⁷ **The FEV1** is the volume exhaled during the first second of a forced expiratory maneuver started from the level of total lung capacity. (www.spirxper.com)

²⁸ **Expiratory peak flow (PEF)** is the maximum flow generated during expiration performed with maximal force and started after a full inspiration. (www.spirxper.com)

²⁹ John Gibson (2012) European Lung White Book, Published by the European Respiratory Society: p.140

Talking about clinical manifestations of asthma, it is important to point out that there is a set of symptoms, but they appear differently from person to person and even one patient can experience absolutely different combination of signs over time. If we go back to Siarhei's case, on the early stages of asthma he had the same symptoms as he had had while suffering from seasonal allergy – eyes itching, urticaria and sneezing, - however sometime later urticaria almost disappeared but a strong cough started. In other words, all the symptoms which characterize asthma are set, but the combinations of them may be absolutely diverse.

Most common symptoms of asthma are the following: chest tightness, cough and shortness of breath, wheezing. The symptoms often make worse in the night time and in the morning. The worst cases in the conditions of asthma attacks occur because of some aggravating factors – after respiratory infections or physical attenuation³⁰.

Among all types of asthma there is one type which is called 'occupational asthma' or 'work related' asthma. At the moment this type of asthma is forming 15 % of all asthma cases and it is caused by the allergic air agents found in the workplace. This type of asthma is regarded to be easiest to deal with (change occupation for the patient) but at the same time it put a lot of restrictions for the patient's lifestyle.

Nowadays the doctors all over the world are trying to reveal the most effective ways to treat and prevent asthma, but since the origins of the disease stay unclear, it is hard to develop an effective way to prevent asthma from expanding. As it was previously mentioned, currently modern asthma medications can control the symptoms of asthma, but it is nowadays impossible to identify the reasons why asthma appear and how to eliminate them. Therefore it may be concluded that more researches on asthma are needed.

3.3 The focus of the project

The main idea of the service which was found out by Siarhei, was to provide a very narrow kind of service, which focuses on specific group of potential clients – people with respiratory diseases such as bronchial asthma (including allergic forms), seasonal allergies (pollinosis / pollen disease), allergic rhinitis and Allergic urticaria. Since all these diseases are caused by allergens (except for non-allergic forms of asthma), a special therapy in the salt

³⁰ World Health Organization (2011), What triggers asthma, <http://www.who.int/features/qa/46/en/>

caves may help the patients to get over their health problems by positively effecting the respiratory system with the special air conditions provided in the caves under the ground³¹.

However in order to launch a successful project it was absolutely necessary to target a clear segment of potential clients to work out the best strategy. The main difficulty of that was to extract from all potential clients the group which might be interested in trying out the service in Belarus. At the moment a number of people with asthma varies worldwide from country to country but “*more than 5% of any investigated population suffers from asthma*”³². (See Appendix 2)

Moreover talking about allergies of all kinds and other types of respiratory and skin diseases caused by the allergens, the final number may be enormous. Therefore it was decided to concentrate firstly only on those who have bronchial allergic asthma.

The second step narrow down the final segment was to understand the location of potential clients. Since the project implies a medical tour to the Republic of Belarus, it was evident that it does not make sense to include into the final segment people who live far from Belarus, because their logistics cost may be so high, that it will be almost impossible to relocate them to try out the services at least till the moment when the service becomes well-known and demanded.

In order to segment a target group, Siarhei is preparing an on-line survey in order to confirm or reject a hypothesis that a potential client of SpeleoHealth may resemble “an average” patient of the Center. According to the information provided by the Center, mostly an average age of the patient is 38 years with a mild or moderate extent of disease³³. However this information cannot be used because these patients do not use a medical tour service and only experience speleotherapy services.

It is also important to state that the Center also accepts children over 10 years old with their legal representative. The children receive the services in the same caves, but at different time (only by day). Moreover there is a special accommodation for the children (they live with their parents or legal representatives, but separated from the blocks with general patients). However the focus of this paper is made on adult patients.

³¹ Based on the researchers conducted in Russian, also from own experience and communication with the patients in the Center.

³² Cezmi A. Akdis, Ioana Agache (2013), Global Atlas of Asthma, Published by the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: p.2

³³ Based on internal information provided by the Center.

Therefore taking into account the asthma statistics worldwide, the conclusion was made to focus on the West European countries and include the UK and Ireland. Other potential client's characteristics still must be examined.

3.4 The first steps

Having an idea on his mind, Siarhei decided to start the project which is oriented at the people with bronchial asthma and who reside in West Europe, the UK and Ireland and have an intention to try out an alternative drug-free method to prevent asthma.

The first practical issue Siarhei faced was a legal form of the company and the best way to start advertising it. The first idea was to set up a new business in the Republic of Belarus since the Center's location is in Soligorsk, Belarus, and therefore it is better to work under the same legislature system as the very Center. However it was too quickly to invest into a new company in Belarus, especially when the market is not thoroughly analyzed yet. But at the same time it is impossible to offer the services of the non-existing company. Therefore an alternative **solution** was found.

Being a co-founder of another company in Lithuania, Vilnius, Siarhei decided just to expand it and therefore a new company – SpeleoHelath - was founded, which was legally established as a part of the Lithuanian company. Moreover a European registration of the company may facilitate the working process with the EU residents (potential clients of SpeleoHealth).

From the very beginning of the work, there was often a misunderstanding of the concept of SpeleoHelath: from the one hand the company offers speleotherapy services in Belarusian Speleotherapy Center, from the other hand – it does not provide the services itself, but support the patients in their process of going and stay in the center. Therefore it was decided to position SpeleoHealth from the very beginning as a medical tour operator and not as a medical company.

So after the legal issues were set up, a new company appeared – SpeleoHealth (See Appendix 3). SpeleoHealth – is a medical tour operator which provides services of medical tours first to the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center in Soligorsk, Belarus.

Since from the very beginning it was planned that SpeleoHealth would be offering the speleotherapy services in Belarusian Speleotherapy Center, a potential risk of high bargaining power of the Center itself came on the stage.

3.5 Belarusian Speleotherapy Center in Soligorsk

Belarusian Speleotherapy Center is a unique place. It was built in 1990 in the first section of the salt mining company BelarusKali based in Soligorsk. Belaruskali is one of the biggest producers of potassium fertilizers worldwide. Therefore the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center was constructed as a huge complex according to the highest mining-industry standards.

“Belarusian Speleotherapy Center” – is a unique place in the world (located 140 km from the Belarusian capital), when bronchial asthma and allergy may be treated in the natural salt mines. Speleotherapy complex is located 420 m under the ground and has its own infrastructure and ventilation system. The caves of the Center are characterized by a special microclimate of the air, which is filled - with aerosols of sodium, potassium and magnesium ions (See Appendix 13 and Appendix 14). For 26 years the center has been the only place where non-medical treatment of asthma and allergy was offered. Scientific researched conducted in the Center proved an effectiveness of speleotherapy for the patients with respiratory diseases. Moreover the researches about the effectiveness of speleotherapy have been also conducted on international level. According to the researches, the following conclusion was done: *"Daily hypertonic saline nasal irrigation improves sinus-related quality of life, decreases symptoms, and decreases medication use in patients with frequent sinusitis. Primary care physicians can feel comfortable recommending this therapy"*³⁴.

According to Garavello W. (2006), conducted in 2006 to test hypersaline nasal irrigation in children with symptomatic seasonal allergic rhinitis it was proved that the study *"supports the use of a three-times daily regimen of nasal irrigation with hypertonic saline in the pediatric patient with seasonal allergic rhinitis. The treatment is tolerable, inexpensive and effective"*³⁵.

³⁴ Alina V. Chervinskaya, Nora A.Zilber (1995), “Halotherapy for treatment of respiratory diseases”, Journal of Aerosol Medicine, Number 3, Mary Ann Licbert, Inc.

³⁵ Garavello W, Romagnoli M, Sordo L, Gaini RM, Di Berardino C, Angrisano A. Hypersaline nasal irrigation in children with symptomatic seasonal allergic rhinitis: A randomized study. *PediatrAllergyImmunol* 2003;14:140–143.2003BlackwellMunksgaard

The stay of a patient in the Center consists of two parts: in an underground section and in a recreational complex. A patient chooses a shift when he wants to have speleotherapy (by day or by night) and the second part of the day he spends in the above-the-ground section, which is built as a resort.

The underground section with the salt caves is characterized by special air conditions which are maintained by 2-km long ventilation system which filters and eliminates potential allergens and bacteria before the air comes to the caves with the patients. The air analysis shows that the caves air is several times cleaner than in a surgery room at hospital.

The surveys of the patients show that one course of speleotherapy helps to reduce a frequency of asthma attacks in 99 % cases and fully eliminate them – in 43 % of the cases³⁶.

In sum, Belarusian Speleotherapy Center is a really unique place, since the very way of its construction and maintenance corresponds to the highest safety standards and the results of the treatment are proved to be very effective.

3.6 Partnership Strategy

The first question which crosses the mind, when the uniqueness of the Center is described: why are there not so many patients from all over the world, if it is so effective? Siarhei also had the same question but the answer contains an opportunity as well as a huge risk. The thing is that the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center is a state-owned Center as well as the enterprise it belongs to (Belaruskali). As a result of it the majority of the places in the center are distributed among the residents of the Republic of Belarus on a free-of-charge basis as a part of the national healthcare system (around 80 % of all the places). The remaining 20 % are purchased by the patients who find out about the Clinic from their friends, relatives, doctor's recommendation but in a Russian speaking area. Therefore the Clinic is not urged to launch any marketing strategy targeting international patients, because there is no lack of demand from the Russian speaking clients. As a result few people out of the former USSR countries know about the center. However in case of requests, the Center is always ready to accept the patients from abroad. Definitely this may be regarded as an opportunity for SpeleoHealth which can become a marketing bridge between the Center and international patients.

From the other hand a big risk is concentrated in the same place where the previously described opportunity comes from. If 100 % of the SpeleoHealth business activities depend on the Center with a limited capacity and moreover with a state-owned type of administration,

³⁶ <http://speleo.by/>

than at one moment the whole business might shut down if the Center denies cooperating. Therefore Siarhei decided to contact the Center before establishing the company and agree on the agent activities. After receiving an approval from the Center administration and signing the agent contract (which somehow guarantees a smooth cooperation), the first stages mentioned above were implemented.

Nevertheless Siarhei felt that anyway the Center is going to have an enormous bargaining power and still may at some moment urge SpeleoHealth to stop offering the services, if the Center decides to increase the prices or change the rules of the patients acceptance. Therefore it was decided to start SpeleoHealth operation with a work with the Center in Belarus but after initial steps and receiving the feedback from the first clients, also expand the speleotherapy services, including into the list of the centers other ones, located in Russia, Armenia, Ukraine and Poland (See Appendix 4).

It is clear that they all have different advantages and disadvantages and the Center in Belarus at the moment has aggregated the biggest number of unique services, but anyway by expanding a portfolio SpeleoHealth may have a safety cushion and in case of emergency to relocate the patients to other places until possible issues with the Center in Belarus are settled.

3.7 SpeleoHealth services

So after a close analysis of the services offered by Belarusian Speleotherapy Center, it was decided clearly define the services which can be offered by the Center and what extra services may be added by SpeleoHealth.

Figure 2 – Distinction of the Services provided by the Center and SpeleoHealth³⁷

Belarusian Speleotherapy Center	SpeleoHealth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speleotherapy for the patients with respiratory diseases, including Bronchial asthma, pollinosis / pollen disease, allergic rhinitis, allergic urticaria • Extra psysiotherapy services such as sauna, stone therapy, vacuum-roll massage "Starvac SPOriginal", radio-wave skin tightening "Reaction", stone therapy, lymphatic drainage, mini-sauna Cedar barrel, SPA capsule, luminotherapy, phytotherapy, Nauheim bath, blood laser illumination and other. • All kinds of additional therapies can be added to speleotherapy in any combination if the health state of the patient is satisfactory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full organizational support of a patient - from the stage of pre-therapy consultation, stays booking, supporting in choosing and adding extra psysiotherapy servies, till the stage of post-therapy support; • The organization of consultations in visa support, including contacting the consulates of Belarus in the countries of potential clients • The provision of all logistics solutions of the patients coming to the Center: a transfer from the Minsk airport to the Center in Soligorsk and back; possible sightseeing tours to the cities in Belarus. • 24/7 phone support (including language support)

³⁷ Author, adapted from speleohealth.com

This services scope division helped to identify the profile of SpeleoHealth – a tour medical operator, which supports the clients organizationally, but does not provide medical services itself, which enables to avoid special licenses or any other permissions requested by the European Union from the companies which work in medicine industry.

3.8 Overview of the Belarusian medical tourism market

After an initial research of the market, Siarhei paid attention to the companies which work in the same industry, providing medical tours the patients from the countries all over the world. But the biggest accent was made on the Belarusian market of medical tour services. The main conclusions of this market can be the following:

- The market of medical tourism is developing very slowly and there are hardly a lot of companies which stay in the industry without switching to another business sphere for a long time;
- There is a mix of definitions on the market when medical tourism is mixed with recreational (health) tourism, which is developing in the country very dynamically;
- 95 % of the patients of both medical and health tourism in Belarus who are not Belarusian residents are coming from the Russian Federation;
- There are not so many investments into medical tourism because of a very long pay-back period. Health tourism projects are more popular among investors because such projects could be easier integrated with other businesses such as entertainment industry, restaurant businesses etc;
- An average invoice which a non-resident pays up after having a service of medical tourism in Belarus is 3000 – 3500 USD;
- 70 % of all the medical tourism services are offered by state-owned medical institutions directly; only 30 % go from the private sector, which also includes the incomes of the agents who work according to the same strategy as SpeleoHealth;
- An approximate size of the Belarusian medical tourism market is USD 33,2 million in 2015;
- At the moment the market is being relapsing after a slump in 2014-2015 but has not yet reached the peak as it was in 2013. The slump was caused by financial distress on the Russian market;

- The structure of the services on this market is being changed and the national structure of the patients almost stays unchanged – more than 90 % of all the clients are the patients from Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan³⁸.

In sum, it is evident that the market of medical services in Belarus is not big and concentrated³⁹. The clients focus is made on the Russian speaking region with a very small attention to non-Russian speakers. The risks of the business may be relatively high because of ownership forms of the medical institutions which provide 70 % of the services. The overview of the market corresponds with the main conclusions done by Siarhei in the Business Strategy section, which may guarantee a more thorough analysis of the first stages of the project launch.

3.9 Channels of Business Promotion

A medical tourism sphere is a specific branch of medical business which has its own ways of possible advertising. The main features of this kind of business may be stated as the following:

- Medical tour services may be offered mostly on-line through a web-site and contextual advertisements;
- Another strong source of attracting new clients is a ‘word of mouth’ principle, but it is absolutely not controlled by a business owner and unlikely can be effective on the first initial steps of the project, when only a few clients have tried the services of the company;
- Usually the business in this sphere shares the information about the services also in social networks, however based on the practice (at least with Russian speaking clients), it can be concluded that the patients are not ready to make a solution to try a medical service based on the information in social networks. Moreover it is absolutely rejected by the clients to share any information about their health state in the networks. However social networks are an effective way to inform about the services and use a “story telling” way to reach a target audience.
- It is hard to promote the medical services on medical exhibitions because them majority of the participants are never potential direct clients.

³⁸ Author, the conclusions were translated and adapted from the source: <http://probusiness.by/>

³⁹ Here is meant a market concentration, defined by a number of firms holding the most market shares.

A business which operates in the field of medical tourism may hardly have constant loyal clients, because in case of this business if clients return it is not a sign of good services provided, but on the contrary – it means that the first time not effective services were offered.

Summarizing the main conclusions about the promotional business channels, it is possible to reveal the most effective ones: on-line promotions (through a web-site or special medical portals, where the information is published about the services of the Center without any requests of private health information from the patients' side); doctor's recommendations and a word of mouth, which are both may be developed after the first feedback come out from the patients who tried these services and shared the experience; social networks but with limited promotional options.

Since SpeleoHealth is only in the first stages of its business development and have no feedback from the clients, Siarhei decided to use the first promotional tool mentioned above – a company web-site. Therefore a new web-site was created and registered in the domain www.speleohealth.com (See Appendix 7 - 11).

The web-site consists of the five main blocks:

‘Home’ – this part provides the information about SpeleoHealth Company. A part ‘What we do’ defines a service which SpeleoHealth specializes on – speleotherapy; and gives a short overview of the services which are offered by SpeleoHealth but as a medical tour operator. Also a block ‘The Center’ explains what the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center is and why it is unique. Also the main page ‘Home’ contains information about the indications which addresses the course in the Center and also contains a notice about speleotherapy for children.

The second block – ‘Speleotherapy’ – provides a detailed information about the history of speleotherapy and the Center in Soligorsk. Also there is some technical information about the caves in the Center (air technical characteristics, such as air temperature, relative humidity, air mobility, content of salt aerosol and many others).

A block ‘Services’ offers a clear division of the services provided by SpeleoHealth and the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center. Moreover the medical services in the Center are also divided between speleotherapy services and extra services which are not included into the main services offer – physiotherapy.

The next section – ‘Booking’ – leads to a page, where a client may make a pre-booking and choose the time he or she would like to stay in the Center. Also the page contains the information about the services which are included into the basic packaged (for example, speleotherapy course, meals and accommodation etc.).

The final block – ‘Contacts’ provides the information about the contacts of the SpeleoHealth specialists (mobile phone number, skype and e-mail address) as well as contains a map with the Center location and a request form which can be used by a user in case of any questions.

At the moment the web-site is not dynamic (no external links and social networks or advertisements), because for some time it will be tested in order to be sure that the patients (they may be of absolutely different age) can use the web-site easily. The upgrades in design and the functions may be done only after a feedback from the clients’ side.

Apart from the web-site, the next potential step in on-online promotion may be associated with the company pages on LinkedIn, Facebook, VK, and Instagram for representative purposes and also to communicate with the clients, to promote the services. However the experience with the Russian-speaking clients revealed that there is a lack of desire from the clients’ side to participate in such groups because it is an indirect share of private information about the health. Therefore it should be tested and only after that a promotion strategy may be updated.

3.10 Financial estimation of the project

Before launching the project, Siarhei was thinking about the financial side of SpeleoHealth. Since the company was established based on already existing one, there are no costs of establishing a legal entity in the European Union. Therefore to some extent, the initial costs of SpeleoHealth may be narrowed down to the following: web-site creation and publication, domain costs, SEO optimization, additional costs connected with phone calls while supporting the clients etc. So it is evident that initial investments are very low, which lets Siarhei to start testing the project without any big financial risks.

Therefore talking about potential future revenues, it is better first to analyze the prices of the Center for the services, understand the costs of SpeleoHealth mentioned above transferred to a period of time, and introduce a fix margin percentage.

First of all, the prices of the services were requested from the Center administration after signing the agent contract. It is important to state that the prices are published by the Center each year and they are different for Belarusian residents, Russian residents and the residents of other countries. This price difference is caused by the government healthcare systems in Belarus and Russia and therefore a price increase for non-Belarusian patients may occur.

Since the price of the stay depends on many factors and can be fixed only after the patient chooses a number of services, it is hard to estimate potential cash flow. For these purposes Siarhei has chosen the most popular conditions of stay in Center: 15 days stay (minimum recommended length of speleotherapy), standard meal menu (however it may be changed upon request), a single one bed room lux.

According to the pricelist provided by the Center, a one day stay in a single lux and single general cost EUR 68 and EUR 62 accordingly:

Figure 3 - The prices for one day stay in the Center in 2017 and in 2016⁴⁰

Type of the room	Prices for one day stay in 2017 (January - March)	Prices for one day stay in 2017 (October - December)	Price Change
Single room lux	€ 68,00	€ 62,00	110%
Single room	€ 62,00	€ 57,00	109%

Having analyzed the data, it is clear that the prices have increased by 9-10 % which may be explained by the seasonal price change: usually the prices for stay in October and December are lower than at the beginning of the year, however taking into account the internal price rise of the Center, SpeleoHealth must also keep to these changes.

It was decided by Siarhei that the basic SpeleoHealth services will be including: Transfer from the Airport to the Center and back at the end of the stay; Visa assistance, 24/7 phone support, Language support if needed. Depending on the client's needs, other services may be added, such as sightseeing tours to Minsk or other cities in Belarus. Also upon the clients' request, SpeleoHealth may arrange all other logistics issues concerning the flights from the patients' home country and back.

⁴⁰ Author, adapted from the pricelist provided by speleo.by

The revenue of SpeleoHealth will be formed by charging a fixed tour operator fee, which is an average price of one-day stay in the Center – EUR 60. Therefore a final price for 15-day stay for a patient in a single room lux will be the following:

Figure 4 – The prices for one 15-day stay in the Center in 2017 and in 2016⁴¹

Type of the room	Prices for one 15-day stay in 2017, including SpeleoHealth services
1. Single room lux	€ 1 020,00
2. SpeleoHealth services:	€ 130,00
2.1 Transfer from the Airport to the Center	€ 25,00
2.2 Transfer from the Center to the airport	€ 25,00
2.3 Visa assistance	€ 40,00
2.4 24/7 phone support	€ 25,00
2.5 Language support if needed	€ 15,00
3. Fixed tour operator fee	€ 60,00
Final price to be paid to SpeleoHealth	€ 1 210,00

The final price of EUR 1210 may be used only in the report as a target one, because the factors which influence the price are diverse and changeable. Therefore the price-setting policy is much customized and depends from person to person⁴².

3.11 Current Stage of SpeleoHealth

Presently SpeleoHealth has reached the following results:

- Official registration in the European Union with the name SpeleoHealth. The activities of the company lie in the scope of medical tour operator services and the company itself is responsible for arranging and supporting a medical tour of a patient first to the Belarusian Speleotheapy Center;
- Web-Site launch (www.speleohealth.com) which provides a full information about SpeleoHealth Company, the Belarusian Speleotheapy Center, the services which are offered both by SpeleoHealth and the Center. Also it enables to send a request concerning the stay conditions, the times of possible arrivals, questions about the prices and legal issues such as visa support and transportation to the Center.

⁴¹ Author, adapted from the pricelist provided by www.speleo.by and expanded

⁴² All the SpeleoHealth services costs are provided based on author's own estimates

- An Agent agreement with the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center is signed according to which SpeleoHealth may look for the clients who want to stay in the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center and the later in its turn guarantee a place after booking.
- Initial marketing research activities are fulfilled: qualitative research launch, on-line marketing campaign in social networks.

At the moment Siarhei is also looking for associations and organizations which work with the patients with respiratory diseases in Europe and the UK to describe speleotherapy services which SpeleoHealth may provide.

3.12 The Next Steps

Being ambitious about SpeleoHealth, Siarhei is determined to develop the project from its current initial stage to principally another more mature one. The short-term prospects rely on starting exploiting the web-site as a selling tool to attract first clients and after receiving their feedback purify the offer of SpeleoHealth making it more customized. Moreover within the time scope of 1-2 years it is important to understand which promotion tools work better for the clients out of Russian speaking area. Since promotional tools are limited due to the business characteristics, it is absolutely necessary to use them very effectively until that time when a critical number of the patients who tried the services may form a basis for a 'word of mouth' effect.

Talking about long-term goals, Siarhei is aiming at expanding the whole business not only on a quantity level (number of clients) but also on a quality level (new services from other speleotherapy centers in neighbor countries). This will enable to avoid the risks of the whole business being paralyzed by institutional decisions of the Center which cannot be affected by any market negotiations.

3.13 Conclusions

In conclusion it is necessary to say that SpeleoHealth has passed the first administrative stages of the business launch and seems to be in the rights place and in the right time, however further steps, including expanding a client base and improving a present offer of the company cannot be made without testing the first stays of the first clients. Therefore as a short-term goal it is necessary to find first clients who could provide a feedback for further improvements. As a long-term goal it is necessary to understand how to

make the business sustainable, scalable and eliminate potential institutional risks. Therefore the main questions are:

1. What is the best way to attract the clients for SpeleoHealth?
2. How to decrease the risks of blocking the business by offering a service of only one state-owned institution?

Chapter 4: TEACHING NOTES

4.1 Teaching objectives

This case study is written for the students who has an entrepreneurial spirit, are interested in start-ups which combine several business dimensions and use modern means of communications as a promotion tool (social media, contextual advertising). Also the case may be useful for courses which cover the managerial aspects of project launches, especially international ones, which cover intercultural business operations. This case may indicate the main stages of a new idea to be invented from a personally important issue and developed through initial stages up to the point when the project may be implemented.

Also the case shows the combination of factors which define the risks of potential project. Some of the risks are institutional and the others - operational. The strategy to deal with them based on the short and long-term plans priorities may be applicable in various similar start-ups, dealing, for example, with non-market conditions, such as state-owned companies or cultural differences.

The main learning goals of the case are the following:

- This business case shows the main steps of business creation from the idea to legal entity set up and outline the first initial steps of the project, including the analysis of promotional tools of the project, development of the main of them, segmentation of potential clients and trying to understand the main principles how to reach the target audience (what tools and in what proportions may be used);
- The case exposes the importance of the project definition: if the business aggregates several fields (tour support and medical services) it is important to define what exact set of services is offered by each part of the business chain.
- Moreover the case covers the aspects of business risks connected to institutional factors (including political risks and cultural differences). The importance of services diversification in case of business focus is absolutely crucial.
- The students must be able to analyze the process of SpeleoHealth creation, critically estimate current state of the business, and work out the best potential strategy in a short and long-term prospect to answer the main questions of the case.

4.2 Teaching questions

SpeleoHealth is a project which combines several business issues (business dimensions) and at the same time has specific characteristics of a start-up, which makes it very useful to analyze. The main teaching questions of the case may be defined as the following:

TQ1 – What is the best strategy for SpeleoHealth to attract first clients to try the services?

TQ2 – What are the main risks of the project and how these risks may be minimized taking into account a strong focus of the project (including a focus on the only one services provider at least in the early stages)?

4.3 Suggested Teaching Methods

Using this case in the class, it may be interesting to introduce it while covering the topics of start-up risks in international environment, including economic system risks as well as political and institutional risks. It is recommended this case to be offered as a project for a consulting team of students.

Thus, the simulation may be provided: Siarhei as a founder of the project is hiring a team of consultants who must specialize in strategic managerial decisions for young small and medium-size companies. The main purpose of the consulting project is to analyze the steps of SpeleoHealth launch, reveal the weak and risky points of the current project stage and think about a potential development strategy for a short-term period (to address the urgent needs of clients attraction) as well as for a long-term – to eliminate the risks of a strong business focus. The students in the groups may be analyzing a former initial promotion strategy of the company, work out the improvements and think about recommendations of introducing new tools to promote the services. Also it would be desirable from the students' side to conduct a small on-line or off-line marketing research to test whether the target audience (target segment) was chosen correctly.

Based on the learning objectives, the teaching recommendations are the following:

- a recommended size of a group – 4 members;
- a full access to the case have to be provided;
- Siarhei may come to the first class to introduce the case and also supervise the consulting project upon students' or teacher's request;

- The results must be submitted in a form of a final 15 min presentation.

4.4 Analysis & Discussion

This part of the works is aimed at stating the guidelines for the students to address the teaching questions. Therefore a short analysis of the key sides of the projects will be provided in order to support the students' involvement. The following resources may be used by the students in the project:

- A draft of the survey which can be conducted by the students groups to test the segments and work out the best promotional strategy for SpeleoHealth (Appendix 12);
- An access to SpeleoHealth web-site information (statistics of visits etc.);
- An access to the case study and Literature Review;

TQ1 – What is the best strategy for SpeleoHealth to attract the first clients to try the services?

As it was described by Oliver Kesar (2011) and in the Case Study, the specific characteristics of the business may not enable to use the general approaches to attract new clients. In the Case Study part it was mentioned, the target segment of the project consists of the people who suffer from respiratory diseases, asthma in particular, and therefore they must be looking for non-medical alternative treatment only in case of health disruption or asthma attacks deterioration (will be checked by the research). Therefore a potential target segment: people over 30 years old from Europe, the UK and Ireland with an average and high level of income, risk-assertive and flexible in time. Another specific feature of the project is that it is in the early stage of the business life-cycle and therefore does not have a word-of-mouth effect and feedback from first clients (we avoid talking about loyal constant clients, because medical tourism does not imply this term at all). Moreover referring to Porter, M. (2002), a developing economy such as Belarusian one, may have a lack of business infrastructure, therefore potential barriers may slow down the first steps of the project.

Also it is very important to work on credibility of the Center, because in healthcare it may be a decisive point, when a patient chooses to consume a service at this particular place. Since the target group of clients may be reluctant to share any information about their health state by registering in social network groups or communities (up to a certain level), such tools of social media as Facebook, VK, Instagram can be used only partially, for example

informational purposes, e.g.: for advertising the services of SpeleoHealth, publishing the news about SpeleoHealth etc.

However if the results of the research prove that potential clients segment may include the people who actively use social networks, it could lead to a re-thinking of on-line promotional strategy scale, in particularly start exploiting Facebook promotional strategies, such as targeted advertisements. In case of a rise of members in the SpeleoHealth group on Facebook, it is also possible to think about a content-manager role. The same strategy may be applied in the VK Strategy, taking into account that these sources might be effective based on the market experience Keckley, P. (2011).

Talking about partnerships, the first and strategic partnership which is already practiced but may be developed is a communication with the Center itself. The way to upgrade the level of communication and work can be described as a transfer from off-line partnership into on-line dimension. At the moment, the Center has a Facebook page of the Center⁴³, which has about 1300 followers. However the content management can be estimated as negative: new posts appear not more often than once a month, the information available only in Russian and many others. Therefore if partnership appears in on-line dimension, SpeleoHealth may become responsible for content-management for a Facebook group in English version. This agreement would enable the Center to cover a bigger audience from the one side, from the other side – SpeleoHealth will gain an access to the followers which in its turn will help to form a portrait of an average patient of the Center.

At the moment Instagram tool is also considered by Siarhei, but as an independent campaign which can be called #MySpeleoStory. On the official page of SpeleoHealth in English the posts of the patients (who received the treatment in the center) will be describing the results and the patient's experience. It may be working as a feedback section in a form of a "story-telling strategy". However it may be implemented only after getting the first feedback and taking into account that the patients would agree to share this information. Therefore the possibility of such a campaign must be estimated in a long-term perspective.

Another way to attract the clients may be aiming at getting in contact with NGOs and medical associations which may be interested in offering their members effective ways of treating asthma and other respiratory diseases.

⁴³ <https://www.facebook.com/speleo.by>

TQ2 – What are the main risks of the project and how these risks may be minimized taking into account a strong focus of the project (including a focus on the only one services provider at least on the early steps)?

As it was described in the previous sections of the paper, SpeleoHealth is operating on a concentrated market with relatively few entrance barriers, however the risks of these operations are considerably high which may negatively affect the project in a long term perspective. The main risks are the following:

- SpeleoHealth is offering the supporting services for the clients who want to use the speleotheapy services provided by another institution (Belarusian Speleootherapy Center);
- The Belarusian Speleootherapy Center is the first focus of SpeleoHealth therefore the success of the project depends of a smooth cooperation from the very beginning of the work.
- Also it is very important to pay more attention to credibility of the Center from the very beginning and make the results of the researches about the effectiveness of the Center (mentioned above) available among potential clients;
- Belarusian Speleootherapy Center is a state-owned medical institution, which put a number of obstacles, especially when trying to come to a strategic decision about the work. Moreover, the capacity of the Center is limited per month, therefore the business is not scalable at the moment and in case of a demand rise it is necessary to expand the services supply by adding new speleootherapy centers into the portfolio of SpeleoHealth. This measure corresponds to a risk minimization strategy, offered by Peter, B. (2012) and discussed in the Literature Review part.
- In case of the previously described point about a demand rise, SpeleoHealth have to change its focus from offering speleootherapy services in the Belarusian Speleootherapy Center to just offering speleootherapy services in East Europe. This change may bring extra difficulties in business identification.

Before receiving the first feedback from the clients of SpeleoHealth it is impossible to understand how the offer may be improved and what extra risks may appear. But the purpose for today is to anticipate potential risks based on the available information and minimize the already existing risks. Therefore a strategy of SpeleoHealth is always divided into a short and

long term period. The risk issues fall into the long-term period, while the short term goals are concentrated on the first clients' attraction.

Also it is vital to understand the best way, how SpeleoHealth may reach the clients as well as receive feedback from them. At the moment, SpeleoHealth may go either directly to the patients (through social media, personal contacts) and try to offer the services directly. This way may be effective, however without solid credibility of the Center and SpeleoHealth representatives who should approach the clients, this channel may not work smoothly from the very beginning. Another alternative way to reach the clients is to partner with the hospitals which focus on the patients with respiratory diseases. The hospitals representatives (doctors, administration) would definitely be much more trusted by the patients who already receive medical services in these institutions. Also it is possible to pay attention to NGOs and organizations of other types which specialize in working with people with respiratory diseases. The effectiveness of the strategies mentioned above must be tested in further studies.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This case study aims to underline the stages of a new company development which was created from a personally important urge to tackle a problem of treating asthma. A personal attachment of the founder to the problem motivates to develop the project starting from financing the initial launch stages from the own funds and devoting the time for the market research. Therefore SpeleoHealth has covered the first steps required by a new business only for 2 months of its existence: registration, market research, web-site creation, partnership agreements.

In short, SpeleoHealth as a medical tour operator registered in the European Union is offering the services of speleotherapy first in Belarusian Speleotherapy Center in Soligorsk. Being a unique place, the Center opens great perspective for SpeleoHealth but at the same time provides many risks, which have to be taken into account and eliminated as long as possible.

According to the analysis, at the moment the most important point of SpeleoHealth to combine a short and long term strategies: first to start business operations by finding the first clients and after that take care about the business sustainability by expanding its portfolio and looking for new speleotherapy alternatives in the region.

Concerning the limitations, first of all it is necessary to stress that at the moment there is no clear information about a target segment of potential clients, because speleotherapy is rather universal type and may be recommended for a lot of patients. A try to segment the audience is based on thinking experiments and is being tested by the research which is in process now. Moreover an assumption of a target group was built up based on statistics about present Center's patients, which is only partially correct, because they just consume a speleotherapy service, but do not experience a medical tour service. In further studies it is vital to investigate better potential clients segment as well as the way how to get them (direct approach or an approach through hospitals and specialized NGOs which in this case will have a role of mediators).

Also potential promotional tools were characterized based on the client's feedback from another cultural region and an extrapolation may be not fully acceptable. Therefore this issue has to be tested by the research as well.

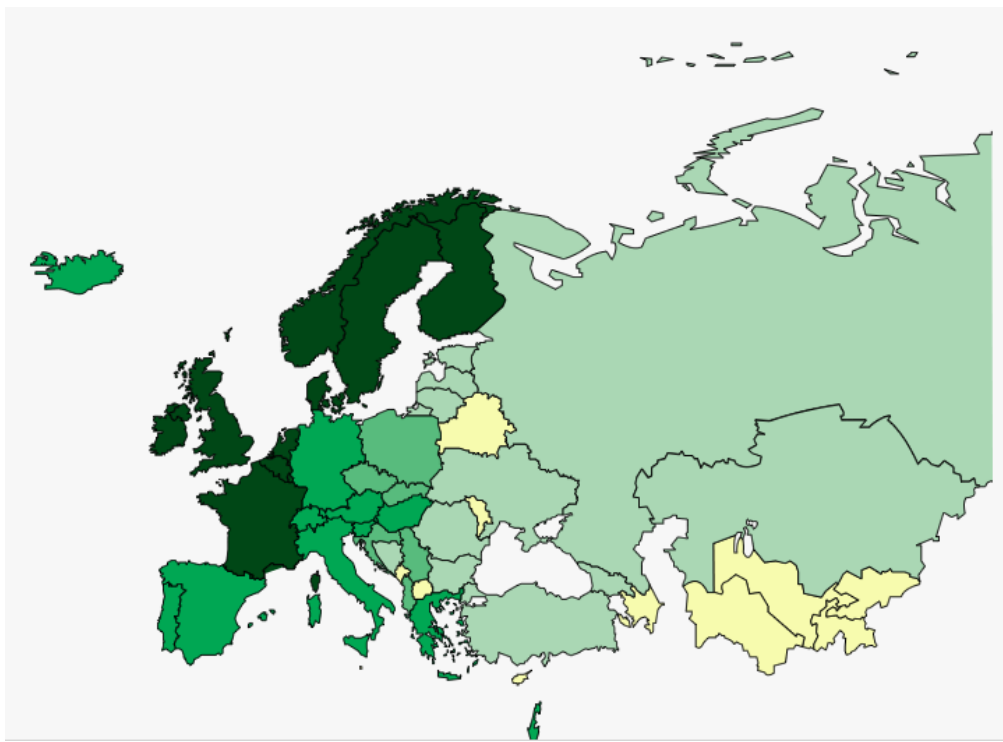
The final limitation is based on the assumption that the patients from Europe, the UK and Ireland would like to try speleotherapy, a therapy which is still being examined by the medical world and not finally approved.

In sum, at the moment there is a range of issues which still must be addressed in further studies of different kinds to facilitate the development of the project. For example, in order to improve credibility of the Center it is necessary to present the already existing researches of the Center for potential clients. Moreover extra researches could be conducted with international experts' participation to make the results more credible and internationally recognized. Another issue is to choose the segment of potential clients in a more accurate way that is why a set of surveys should be conducted on-line (a possible survey samples can be found in Appendix). Also it is important to choose the best way to reach the patients, choosing one of the mentioned ways (direct approach or through mediators).

At the end, I would like to say that it was a big pleasure to work and write about my own project; analyze it on a dynamic basis. I am very optimistic about the project since it touches my feeling and requires a solution to a problem which I faced and could solve. Therefore I will continue do my best to improve SpeleoHealth and try to make this business sustainable.

APPENDICIES

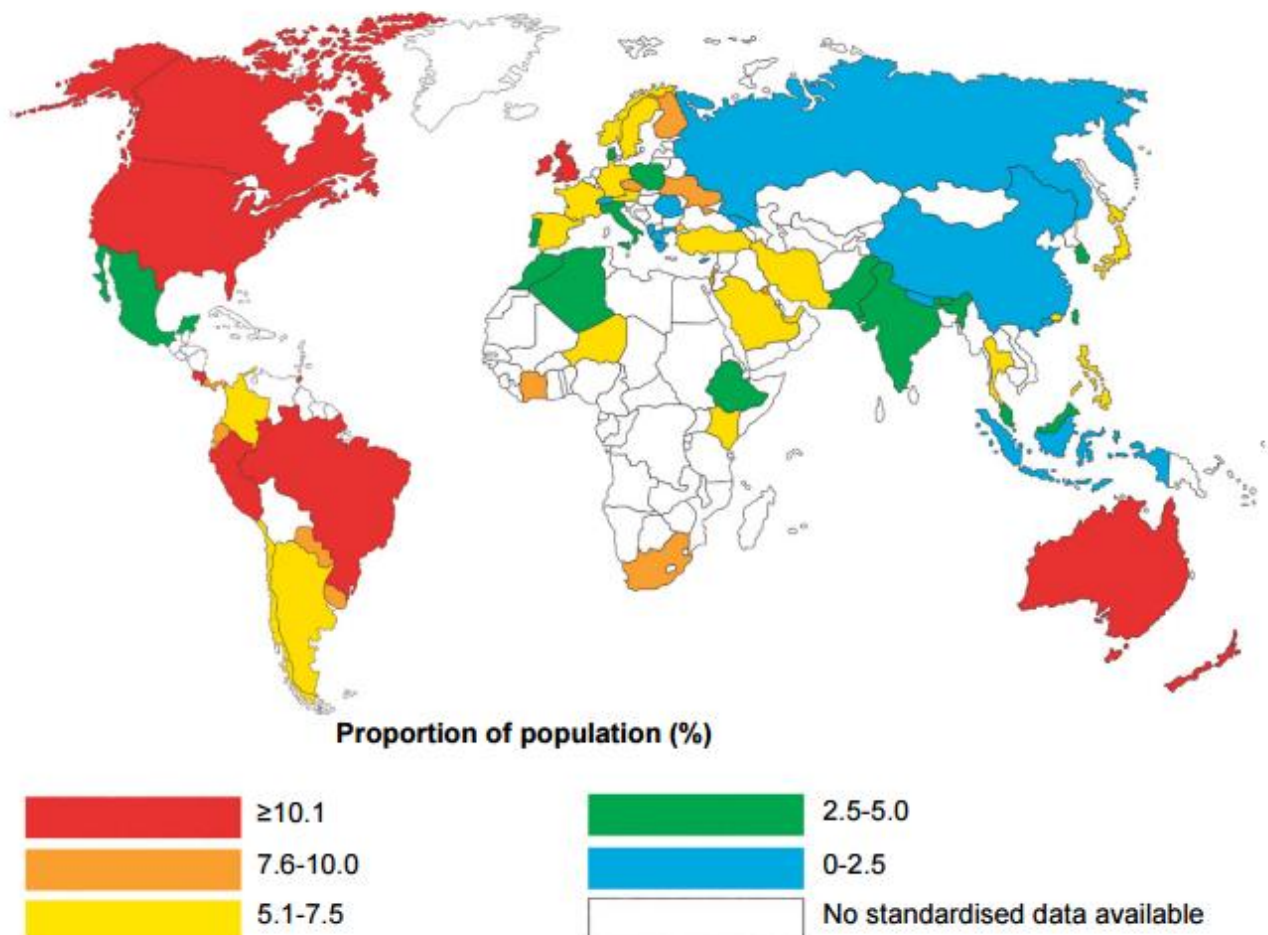
Appendix 1: Prevalence of asthma ever in adults aged 18-44 years (% of population) in Europe in 2000-2011.



Country	% of population	Country	% of population	Country	% of population	Country	% of population
Sweden	20,62	Luxembourg	9,18	Iceland	6,7	Latvia	2,64
UK	17,84	Slovenia	8,75	Italy	6,26	Ukraine	2,59
Netherlands	15,41	Germany	7,91	Switzerland	6	Russia	2,43
Norway	11,21	Portugal	7,85	Poland	5,4	Georgia	2,07
France	10,65	Hungary	7,72	Croatia	4,65	Estonia	2,06
Belgium	10,02	Israel	7,62	Czech Republic	4,43	Turkey	2,01
Finland	9,45	Austria	7,38	Albania	4,3	Bulgaria	2
Denmark	9,43	Greece	6,88	Slovakia	4,21	Lithuania	2
Ireland	9,41	Spain	6,75	Serbia	3	Romania	1,6

Source: Author, adapted from the European Lung White Book

Appendix 2: World map of the prevalence of asthma in 2013



Source: Global Atlas of Asthma published by the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology

Appendix 3: Logo of SpeleoHealth (short and long versions)

SpeleoHealth SH



Source: Author

Appendix 4: A list of centers which offer speleotherapy services


N	Location and the name of the Center	Type of speleotherapy
1	Belarus, Soligorsk - Belarusian Speleotherapy Center	Salt mines with white (sodium) and red (potassium) salt
2	Ukraine, Soledar, Speleosatorium Salt Symphony	Salt mines, white salt
3	Russia (Berezniki, Perm region), Speleo Center "Raduga"	Artificially created salt mines
4	Azerbaijan, Duzdag, Nahichevan Recreational Center	Salt mines (mountain type)
5	Armenia, Erevan, Republican Speleocenter	Rock salt caves
6	Slovakia and Hungary, Baradla Domica caves systme	Cold caves
7	Germany, Ennepetal	Cold caves
8	Poland, Wieliczka,	White (sodium) and red (potassium) salt caves
9	Romania, Targu Ocna, Salina Turda, Praid	White (sodium) and red (potassium) salt caves
10	Czech Republic, Zlate Hory	Cold caves
11	Slovenia, Snezhana caves	Cold caves
12	Kyrgyzia Chon-Tuz, Speleological sanatorium	Salt mines (mountain type)

Source: Author

Appendix 5: Web-site Home Page

SpeleoHealth

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[Speleotherapy](#)
[Services](#)
[Booking](#)
[Contacts](#)



WHAT WE DO

SpeleoHealth provides a unique opportunity to treat bronchial asthma and allergy in "Belarusian Speleotherapy Center". One course of speleotherapy helps to reduce a frequency of asthma attacks in 99 % cases and fully eliminate them - in 43 % of the cases. All you need to contact SpeleoHealth and after that our specialists will consult you about the stay in the Center. We provide a full

THE CENTER

"Belarusian Speleotherapy Center" - is the only place in the world when bronchial asthma and allergy may be treated in the natural salt mines. Speleotherapy complex is located 420 m under the ground and has its own infrastructure and ventilation system. For 23 years the center has been the only place where non-medical treatment of asthma and allergy was offered. Scientific

INDICATIONS

- Bronchial asthma
- Pollinosis / pollen disease
- Allergic rhinitis
- Allergic urticaria

SPELEOTHERAPY FOR CHILDREN

Belarusian Speleotherapy Center

[Book Now](#)

Source: www.speleohealth.com

Appendix 6: Reasons for travelling abroad for medical treatment

Percentage of answers	Reason
88%	Affordability (costly in home country)
66%	Accessibility (waiting period is high)
57%	Better Quality (need higher quality than available in home country)
46%	Availability (not available in home country)
38%	Better Care (care and support services are better than in home country)
36%	Tourism Factor (tourism factor is tempting despite of the treatment available/affordable in home country)
30%	Privacy (patient doesn't want to be exposed in home country)
28%	Additional Benefits (other benefits not mentioned above)
26%	Adaptability (treatment is not acceptable in home country)
13%	Other Reasons (any other reason which might not be a usual benefit)

Source: Jagyasi, P. (2010), Medical Tourism Research & Survey Report, (Dubai: ExHealth), available on-line

Appendix 6: Spectrum of health tourism services and facilities

Types of health tourism				
Wellness			Medical	
Holistic	Leisure and recreation	Medical wellness	Medical (therapeutic)	Medical (surgical)
Spiritual	Beauty treatments	Therapeutic recreation	Rehabilitation (illness related)	Cosmetic surgery
Yoga and meditation	Sport and fitness	Rehabilitation (lifestyle related)	Healing and recuperation	Dentistry
New Age	Pampering	Occupational wellness		Operations
		Thalassotherapy		
		Nutritional and Detox programs		

Types of health tourism facilities		
Retreat	Spas	Hospitals and clinics
Ashram	Hotels and resorts	
Festivals	Leisure centres	
Cruises		

Source: ¹ Smith, M., Puczko, L. (2009), *Health and Wellness Tourism*, (Amsterdam: Butterworth Heinemann)

Appendix 7: Web-site Speleotherapy Page

SpeleoHealth

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What is speleotherapy

Speleotherapy (Greek spēlaion "cave") is a type of non-medical respiratory therapy which is based on breathing of the mineral infused air in natural salt mines. This therapy is proved to be one of the most effective drug-free ways to provide the treatment and rehabilitation for the patients with diseases of the respiratory system.

A history of speleotherapy goes back to the Ancient Greece times and Italy (VI -V ages BC), however the first scientific data about a positive effect of salt mines appeared in the 19th century. After the Second World War Speleotherapy became popular first in Germany and Austria, after that in Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and other East European countries.

The first salt complex in Belarusian Speleotherapy Center was built in 1990 and in 2012 was build the second one. Nowadays the Center can accept 450 patients per month.

In 2000 and 2005 scientific researches were conducted in Belarusian Speleotherapy Center which proved the effectiveness of speleotherapy for the patients with breathing problems. At the moment the center has developed its own treatment methodology for the patients with different respiratory diseases, which enables to provide an individual program for each patient in the center.

Air Characteristics

Air temperature - 15,8-17,0 C

Relative humidity: in the warm season 63,0-80,0%

During the cold season - 48,0-78,0%

Air mobility 0,15-0,20m / s

Content of salt aerosol 0,15-0,35mg / m³

Presence of fine salt aerosol (fraction up to 5 m - 85%)

20,80-20,90 oxygen content by volume%

Carbon dioxide content 0,031-0,047%

Low content in air of microflora (total microbial contamination in the air colonies 42-102 m³)

The absence of allergens

High air ionization with the predominance of light air ions of negative and positive charges - 2,19-2,62 * 10³ 1sm³ air

Speleotherapy effects

antiallergic

anti-inflammatory

antibacterial

bronchodilator effect

phlegm effect

immunomodulatory



"SpeleoHealth" © 2016

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Source: www.speleohealth.com

Appendix 8: Web-site Services Page

SpeleoHealth

[Home](#)
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Services

SpeleoHealth offers you a speleotreatment at Belarusian Speleotherapy Center at any time of the year. Together with speleotherapy, you can also choose a wide range of physiotherapy services.



Speleotherapy

Speleotherapy at Belarusian Speleotherapy Center consists of two parts: you spend half of the day in the recreational hotel-type complex and the other part - in the underground complex. Transportation is provided by the Center and it takes about 15 minutes. When you purchase a stay in the center, you choose how many days you want to stay (a recommended time of stay is not less than 14 days) and what other additional physiotherapy services you would like to have. In order to be accepted as a patient at the Center you should have your latest blood tests and doctor's statement about your respiratory disease. In the underground complex there are many activities available: tennis, football, billiards, basketball. If chosen a night shift for underground speleotherapy, then a patient will be experiencing speleotherapy at night (in the underground complex each patient is provided with a bed). For more information, please send a [request](#).



Physiotherapy

Besides speleotherapy, every patient may choose additional physiotherapy in the recreational complex. The Center offers the following types of the services: sauna, stone therapy, vacuum-roll massage "Starvac SPOriginal", radio-wave skin tightening "Reaction", stone therapy, lymphatic drainage, mini-sauna Cedar barrel, SPA capsule, luminotherapy, phytotherapy, Nauheim bath, blood laser illumination and other. All kinds of additional therapies can be added to speleotherapy in any combination if the health state of the patient is satisfactory. For more information, please send a [request](#).

Appendix 9: Web-site Booking Page

SpeleoHealth

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Booking Process

Book Now

A booking process is very simple. You have to fill out the form and our specialist will contact you to consult about all the details and confirm your booking.

A standard-stay price at Belarusian Speleootherapy Center includes the following:




SpeleoHealth services:

- Transfer from the Minsk National airport to the Belarusian Speleootherapy Center and back
- Visa support and all administrative procedures
- 24-hours support by SpeleoHealth consultant
- Language support in case of need

Belarusian Speleootherapy Center services:

- 16 days speleootherapy course
- Meals 4 times a day
- Accommodation (2 beds: the 1st in the recreational complex and the 2nd - in the underground complex). You may choose a type of room
- Dynamic doctor's control
- Physician consultations
- Clinical examination (complete blood test, blood glucose, urinalysis, ECG, spirogram) according to the indications;
- Breathing exercises in the underground speleoocomplex
- Use of sports equipment

If you have any questions, please send us a [request](#) and our specialist will contact you as soon as possible.

Source: www.speleohealth.com

Appendix 10: Web-site Contacts Page

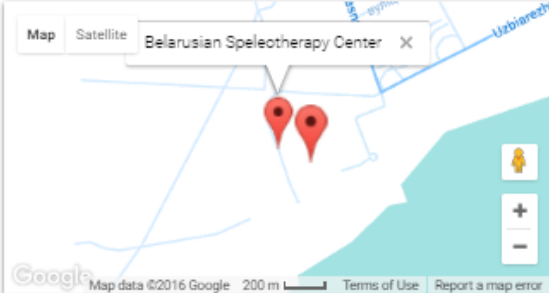
SpeleoHealth

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CONTACTS

Belarus, Soligorsk
223710, Belarusian
Speleootherapy Center
info@grinvich.com

Phone: +375296266162 +351937379693
Skype: grinvich-ltd



Name

Email

Subject

Message

Send

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Source: www.speleohealth.com

Appendix 11: Web-site Pre-booking Form

SpeleoHealth
Pre-Booking Form

Pre-booking form

Full Name *	<input type="text"/>
Country of residence *	<input type="text"/>
E-mail address *	<input type="text"/>
Contact phone number *	<input type="text"/>
Preferred time of arrival	<input type="text"/>
Number of days of stay	<input type="text"/>
Age	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>
Comments	<input type="text"/>

Book

Source: www.speleohealth.com

Appendix 12: On-line Survey Form

qualtrics. | **FREE ACCOUNT**

Welcome to our Survey!

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this important survey, which investigate drug-free methods to treat respiratory diseases. This survey should only take 4-5 minutes to complete. Be assured, that all the answers you provide will be kept in the strictest confidentiality.

>>

0%
100%

qualtrics. | **FREE ACCOUNT**

How old are you?

What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

1. What is your nationality?

<<
>>

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

Do you have asthma? Allergy? Other Respiratory disease? Please, describe.

<<

>>

0%

100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

How would you estimate your disease extent?

- ☐ Mild
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Severe

<<

>>

0%

100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

How often do you take you medications?

- ☐ Every day
- ☐ Several times a week
- ☐ Several times a month
- ☐ I don't take medications

<<

>>

0%

100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

Do you know any drug-free methods to treat respiratory diseases (e.g. bronchial asthma, allergy etc)? Please, write your answer.



0% 100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

Have you ever heard of drug-free method to treat asthma - speleotherapy?

- ☐ Yes, I did
- ☐ No, I didn't
- ☐ I did but I don't know exactly what it is



0% 100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

Speleotherapy (Greek σπήλαια "cave") is the respiratory therapy involving breathing of the mineral infused air of a salt mine. Salt pipes are based on this therapy. Speleotherapy uses this same salt.



0% 100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

According to the statistics, speleotherapy may decrease or even stop your prescription medications. Would you like to try it?

- ☐ Yes, I would
- ☐ No, I would not
- ☐ Probably I would like to try it

<<

>>

0%

100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

Have you ever tried medical tourism services? (Going to another country to get a medical treatment)

- ☐ Yes, I did
- ☐ No, I didn't

<<

>>

0%

100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

Would you agree to try to go to another country for a speleotherapy course?

- ☐ Yes, I would agree
- ☐ No, I would not

<<

>>

0%

100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

After a successful course of speleo therapy, would you agree to share your experience with other people in social networks or on a company's web-site?

- ☐ Yes, I would
- ☐ No, I wouldn't

<<

>>

0% 100%

qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

Do you know any drug-free methods to treat respiratory diseases (e.g. bronchial asthma, allergy etc)? Please, write your answer.

<<

>>

0% 100%

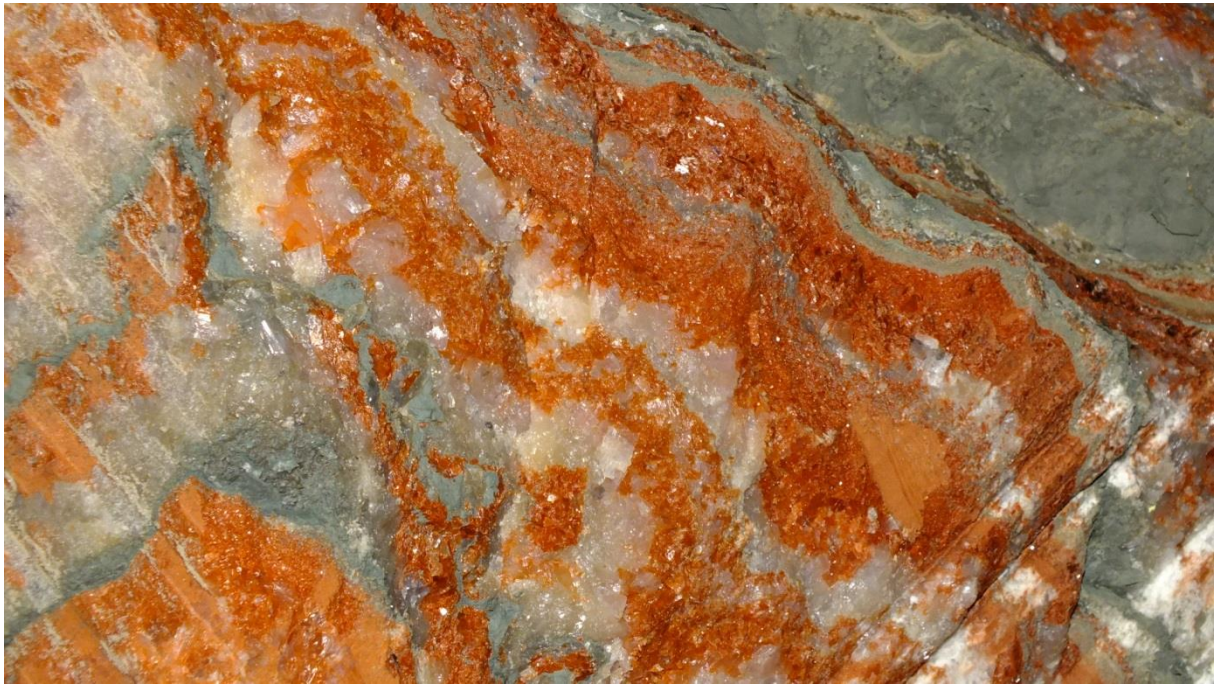
qualtrics. | FREE ACCOUNT

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

0% 100%

Source: Author

Appendix 13: A salt crystal in the caves in the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center



Appendix 14: A salt cave in the Belarusian Speleotherapy Center



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